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 TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [LH](#) [AF](#)
 SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH LITHUANIAN DEFENSE
 MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador John A. Cloud for reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and
 (d).

11. (C) On April 2, Ambassador Cloud held a one-on-one meeting with Lithuanian Defense Minister Rasa Jukneviene, following her return from a visit to Afghanistan. Jukneviene, who had been accompanied by three MPs, said she was very satisfied with her visits to the Lithuanian-run PRT in Ghor and with Lithuanian Special Forces. During a press conference on their return, MP Loreta Grauziniene, chair of the parliament's audit committee, and candidate in the upcoming presidential elections, announced that she came back convinced about Lithuania's commitment to Afghanistan, despite her earlier skepticism.

12. (C) The DefMin said Lithuania will stay in Afghanistan as long as NATO does. The current mandate expires end of 2010, but the Government plans to go back to the Parliament to extend the life of the mandate, which it will do no earlier than this Fall.

13. (C) On the defense budget and government-wide budget cuts, Jukneviene said she has tried to protect personnel and investments, which made for bigger cuts elsewhere. She said she finds herself saddled by two decisions from the previous government: 1) the commitment to move to a professional military, and 2) too many long-term procurement contracts. The previous government committed to a professional military, but didn't fund it, she said, which has resulted in a situation where there are eight officers (including sergeants and above) in the deployment to Afghanistan for each enlisted person. (For the military as a whole, there are 4.6 officers, including sergeants, for each enlisted soldier.) That is not sustainable, she said. On long-term contracts, she said they deny her flexibility in these tough budgetary times. She has tasked her staff with trying to re-negotiate these contracts.

14. (C) The Defense Minister said she is a strong supporter of European Commissioner Dalia Grybauskaite's Presidential candidacy based on two conversations they have had. These focused on governing and transparency and not on security matters. When asked if Grybauskaite had an EU over a NATO bias, the DefMin said that she did not. (Note: In a separate conversation, the PM's foreign policy advisor, Loreta Zakareviciene, said that Grybauskaite would be a strong NATO supporter. Zakareviciene's son is working on Grybauskaite's campaign.)

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